

佛教

On Stopping Killing

By

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(1535 - 1615)

People who eat meat often make the excuse that it is natural to do so, that people were meant to eat meat. They promote this idea, and then freely indulge in taking the lives of their fellow creatures, thereby creating extensive hatred and enmity-karma. Over time, as their killing and consuming becomes a habit, meat eaters no longer feel their killing is unusual. They do their evil deeds unknowingly, unaware of the consequences of slaughter and the resentment it evokes.

As somebody in the past said, "It is a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries." In order to recount our confusion and point out our attachments, I have formulated seven categories, and will explain them below. Any other points to be discussed can be investigated in similar fashion. To begin with, all creatures with awareness share just one identical body. When we humans eat the flesh of our fellow creatures, we are doing a bizarre and abnormal act. Yet we don't feel it is strange, because the whole family takes part, and for generation after generation, killing and eating meat becomes a custom. Our neighbours in the local villages copy one another, and repetition makes the practice seem normal. Over time we lose sensitivity to the wrongness of killing. We think instead, that it is right to kill animals for the good flavour their bodies provide. Our desire for taste dominates our sensibilities, and we no longer feel that eating dead flesh is strange or grossly savage.

Consider, if you will, our response if someone were to kill and eat the body of a human! Surely everyone would reckon it a monstrous act, frightening, and taboo. We would be anxious to execute the culprit as a murderous criminal. Why? Only because eating human meat is very much not a part of our conventional habits. But eating the flesh of animals' bodies has become a habit the world over, so that we no longer feel that killing these creatures is wrong. In fact, "it is a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries."

I | KILLING ON ONE'S BIRTHDAY IS WRONG.

Alas! My parents! They endured great trials to bring me into the world. The very day I came to life was the day my parents nearly died. Thus, to celebrate my birth it is fitting that I avoid all killing, and instead, eat vegetarian food. On that particular day I should extensively do good deeds, and amass merit so that my ancestors might ascend quickly to a higher state of rebirth. In this way, the life-span and blessings of my parents in this life may increase as well.

How can we easily forget the pain and trouble that all mothers go through in giving birth? In this light, how could we then indulge in harming or killing any living thing whose mother suffered to rear and nurture it?

To do so only increases the karmic burden on our parents, and delivers no real benefits to us. But the entire world has made slaughter and meat-eating a habit on birthdays, and no one any longer feels it is wrong. "This is a cause for tears, and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful sighs."

The Emperor Tai Tsung of the Tang Dynasty commanded an army of ten thousand chariots, and still refused to celebrate his birthday. But simple folks in the villages often turn an extra dozen bushels of grain at harvest-time into an occasion for a party. They take any excuse to make merry and to feast non-stop. Certainly there is not much we can do about such habits.

Even so, this year, on our anniversary, if we sponsor vegetarian meal-offerings to the Buddhist Sangha, if we recite sutras and cultivate doing charitable and philanthropic deeds, what a wise and worthy birthday we can celebrate!

II | IT IS WRONG TO TAKE LIFE TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF CHILDREN.

Every family feels grieved when they have no posterity. And when children come, they are delighted. But few people think on behalf of the animals and birds, who by rights, also love their children. If you congratulate me on the birth of my son, how can you then feel comfortable in your heart when, to celebrate the birth of your own child, you kill someone else's son?

If when a baby is first born into the world, we fail to accumulate blessings for it, but instead increase its bad karma by killing to commemorate its birth, isn't this simply too stupid?

Yet the entire world is in the habit of killing and we don't feel it is wrong. This is the second cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful sighs.

A hunter got drunk one evening and in his stupor, thought that his little boy was a buck deer. He snatched up a sharp knife and killed the child. His wife cried and pleaded with him to stop, but being drunk, he wouldn't listen. Only after cutting open the boy's abdomen and extracting his intestines did he finally halt the carnage and fall into a drunken sleep.

He awoke at dawn and called for his son to get ready for a trip to town to sell the venison at the market. His wife sobbed, "But you killed your son last night!" The hunter saw what he had done and clubbed himself so viciously in his grief that his internal organs ruptured, and he died. Alas!

Although animals and humans are different, our love for our children comes from one identical heart. How can we go on killing living creatures?

III | IT IS WRONG TO KILL WHEN WE MAKE OFFERINGS TO OUR ANCESTORS.

When we make offerings to our ancestors we should not kill. On the days when we remember our ancestors' passing, as well on the days of the Spring and Autumn observances, the festivals such as Ching Ming (Clear and Bright), and so forth, we should all avoid killing. People kill to make sacrifices, hoping to increase their ancestors' blessings in the Nether Realms. But this killing, on the contrary, only increases their evil karma. How can an eight-course meal of delicacies revive a heap of bones down in the Nine Springs? (The Nether World.)

Can we really expect that departed souls will receive and eat this food? To try to send them meat sacrifices is not only unbeneficial, it is downright harmful. Wise people will not do such a thing. But it happens nonetheless, because the entire world is in the habit and doesn't recognize it as evil. Truly, "this is a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful sighs."

The Martial Emperor of Liang used noodles as a gift to the spirits, wishing to avoid giving meat, and everyone ridiculed him, saying that his parents and ancestors would have no flesh and blood to eat. Alas! Eating blood is not necessary; we should not consider it a special treat.

What's more, vegetarian food can in no way be considered evil. As children of our parents, it is important to prudently cultivate our own persons, and to avoid humiliating our ancestors. If we can do this much, it is already good enough. Why then assume that we must take others' blood as a necessary offering?

The *Ywe* Ritual (an ancient ceremony used for sacrificial occasions) with its musical offerings, far surpassed any merit gained by killing cows. The *Book of Changes* contains clear instructions regarding the use and purpose of such ceremonies. It says that raising animals to slaughter for sacrifice is an unfilial deed. Since the Sages left us such clear guidelines about this, why then do we insist on making offerings of blood? Where is the value in offering blood? Yet we do this soften!

IV | IT IS WRONG TO KILL TO CELEBRATE A WEDDING.

The fourth point: It is not right to kill to celebrate a wedding. In the customary course of a marriage, starting from the go-between's suggesting names, through receiving the dowry, up to entering the engagement, who knows how many lives we take?

Since marriage is the beginning of a process leading to giving birth, if we kill in order to commemorate the occasion, isn't this the exact opposite in meaning? Further, when we get married, it ought to be very auspicious ceremony. On a very lucky day, to do something evil and barbaric seems cruel and unreasonable. The entire world is in the habit, however, and we don't find it unusual. This is a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries.

When people get married, the wedding party wishes to congratulate them, and hopes that the husband and wife will be companions into old age. Can we reasonably ask that birds and beasts die first in order to make this happen?

The family of the bride keeps candles lit for three days, hoping that she will be able to make a successful departure from her first home. Knowing that this separation from the family is a painful experience, why assume that a similar departure from their families would be a source of joy for birds and beasts? Can we really believe this? Obviously, marriage is not a proper time to kill.

V | IT IS WRONG TO KILL WHEN ENTERTAINING GUESTS.

Killing for feasts is wrong. At this great event, picture the happy, generous hosts and their honored guests. With vegetarian food and soups on the table, nothing obstructs this pure occasion. What need is there to cruelly wrench the life from many living creatures so that every dish we serve can be rich, fatty food?

Envision musical instruments, and voices raised in song, abundant toasts, and resonant good cheer. Imagine then, if at the table we heard wretched screams of anguish and hatred coming from the butcher's block!

Alas! How could anybody with a human conscience avoid feeling great anguish? Yet the entire world is in the habit of killing, and we don't feel that it is wrong. This is the fifth cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries.

Since we know that the meat on the plate came from the butcher's chopping-block, amid screams of outrage and pain, to swap the animal's extreme misery for my extreme happiness simply makes this food unpalatable. Who could swallow it down! Isn't it simply too sad?

VI | IT IS WRONG TO KILL WHEN SEEKING SPIRITUAL AID.

It is not right to kill when we are seeking for spiritual aid. When people get sick, we kill living creatures and make offerings to spirits, seeking their aid and blessings. We fail to think logically that our purpose for an offering to spirits is to avoid death and to prolong life, thus by taking other creatures' lives to prolong our own becomes most illogical and irrational.

Spirits are the most proper and straightforward of all beings. How could a spirit have the slightest selfishness or prejudice? Taking others' life to make offerings to such spirits not only fails to prolong our life, but actually creates more evil karma of killing. The principle is the same with all forms of improper deeds done in the name of sacrifice.

And yet the entire world is in the habit of killing, and doesn't feel it is wrong. Isn't this a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries?

The Sutra of *Medicine Master Thus Come One* says,

“It will not prolong your life to take the lives of other living creatures in hope of appeasing spirits.

Nor will your lifespan increase by calling mountain vampires (Wang Liang Ghosts) and beseeching their spiritual aid and blessings.”

That is to say, our lives do not lengthen as a result of killing. Instead, we create more evil karma of killing.

And so it is with many improper sacrifices, such as those done by people who kill hoping to gain children, or those who kill seeking for wealth, or those who kill seeking appointment to official positions, and so forth. Even if they do get sons or wealth or appointments, such things come to these people as part of their rightful destiny. This is not something that spirits and ghosts can effect in any way.

Furthermore, if we should by chance, get our wishes fulfilled, we might make the wrong conclusion that it came as a magical response. Our belief in the ghosts and spirits would become even more solid. It would be most pitiful if our sacrificial killing then grew even more vigorous, as our deviant views flourished. Who could save us at that point? How sad!

VII | IT IS WRONG TO KILL FOR ONE'S OCCUPATION.

It is wrong to kill to make a living. For the sake of clothing and food, and in order to sustain their livelihood, some people go hunting or fishing, or slaughter cows, sheep, pigs, dogs, and the like.

Yet as I observe, those people who do not work at these jobs have clothes to wear and food to eat all the same. I've never seen them die of hunger or freeze to death. To kill a life in order to sustain a life is something that gods most abhor. You won't find one person out of a hundred who becomes prosperous because of the act of killing. All those people who kill, however, do deeply plant causes for rebirth in the hells, and surely will receive the evil retribution in their future lives. There is no heavier offense than this. Why don't we simply find another way to make a living?

Yet everyone in the world has the habit of killing, and we don't feel it is wrong. This is definitely a cause for tears and sobbing, for wails and cries, for deep regrets, and mournful cries?

myself saw a sheep butcher on the point of death whose mouth bleated just like a sheep. I also saw a fish merchant at life's end, whose head bore what looked like the gills of a fish. These two events happened right in my neighbourhood, and are not stories I heard someone else relate.

So I exhort people in the world! if you have such occupations, you would be better off begging for your food. To create the karma of killing in order to live wouldn't be as good as starving to death but avoiding taking lives. How can you not put an end to your killing?

The above points should cover all the usual excuses made for killing. When intelligent people read this essay they will find it credible, and hard to refute. If they can resolve to completely put an end to all meat-eating, there could be no greater goodness. If they can't abandon all seven reasons for their meat-eating, then they should end as many categories as they can, perhaps four or five, or two or three. Each category of killing cast away eradicates one form of karmic-debt. Reducing killing by as little as one instance eliminates one potential for future vengeance. If we can't completely cut out the stinky flesh in our diet, then we can at least reduce the meat we eat to portions bought in the market-place. Thus we need not kill it ourselves. This avoids the heaviest penalties, and as our thoughts of kindness accumulate that little bit, our entire state of being gradually ascends.

I hope that readers of this essay will circulate it among friends, and urge each other to put it into practice. If you can convince even one person to refrain from an act of killing, then it is the same as having saved one million lives. If you can similarly exhort ten or one hundred or ten million people, the hidden merit and virtue involved is vast and great, and the resulting good karma is incalculable. Anybody who faithfully observes these truths I have laid before you will certainly not regret it! --